



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Roy Reeve, Head of Mission in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 23, 2006

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Reeve, it is very good to see you here once again in Vienna. The last time you and I met was in Tbilisi in January – and gas lines exploded. I hope our meeting today will not cause a similar crisis. We have plenty to accomplish without any kind of distraction.

Since your last report to the Permanent Council in October, much has happened in Georgia and the region. With regard to your Mission's highest priority, the South Ossetia conflict, some things, like the constructive tone and approach in the Ljubljana Ministerial Statement on Georgia and recent unilateral demilitarization and confidence-building measures undertaken by the Government of Georgia, have encouraged hopes for a political settlement. Others, however, including threats to the fragile and tense peace in South Ossetia, raise concerns.

Concerning South Ossetia, the United States looks forward to the meeting of the Joint Control Commission next week in Vladikavkaz and a follow-on meeting in mid-April where the JCC will meet to review and approve a package of development proposals from the Needs Assessment Study. The United States is encouraged by the cooperation that the Needs Assessment Study has engendered amongst Georgians, South Ossetians, Russians, the United States, the EU, and others, and we hope this positive spirit will lead to successful meetings.

Economic development has proven itself to be a common ground and is a core element of the Peace Plan. The United States looks forward to attending the upcoming donors meeting and re-confirms its intention to support implementation of the proposals, which will benefit the populations of South Ossetia, Georgia and, we hope, the entire region.

We regret, however, that there is less to welcome on the political and security front. The failure of the sides to come together at the February JCC meeting in Vienna was a great disappointment to all who had anticipated it as a sign of progress. The United States calls on the sides to renew their efforts at dialogue and accommodation, and echoes the sentiment expressed in the EU Presidency statement of February 21.

We look especially to the Russian Federation, which we believe could do more to help resolve the conflict.

The United States commends the unilateral demilitarization and confidence-building measures announced recently by Georgia and looks forward to hearing more about them from Prime Minister Noghaidei when he appears before the Permanent Council next week. We urge the South Ossetians to take the steps presented to them by the Ambassadors of the

United Kingdom, France, the United States, and Russia at the meeting on March 17th in Tskhinvali. The South Ossetians should also engage promptly with the Georgian side on the draft restitution law. We understand that the OSCE will hold a meeting in April to discuss it and we hope that the South Ossetians will take advantage of this opportunity to comment.

We condemn the March 22nd call by South Ossetian leader Kokoity for the incorporation of South Ossetia into the Russian Federation. We reconfirm our unequivocal support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and the peaceful resolution of both the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts based on that principle.

The United States remains very concerned about the many small security incidents in South Ossetia that could have been taken by the sides as excuses for violence. Moreover, there have been cases where the OSCE's Military Monitoring Officers have been unable to do their work because of interference.

We are concerned by continuing reports of illegal heavy military equipment appearing in the zone of conflict and the reported failure of the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) to ensure verifiable removal of such equipment under OSCE monitoring. Ambassador Reeve's report is the latest example. We strongly condemn the stoning of JPKF and OSCE military monitors as reported in connection with this incident. In light of these incidents, the United States supports Ambassador Reeve's suggestion for a checkpoint at Gupta, which we believe would substantially improve the ability of the JPKF and OSCE to deter further movements of unauthorized equipment into the zone of conflict.

We agree with Ambassador Reeve's assessment that the overall situation would improve if the sides would reaffirm their commitment to the principal of non-use of force. We are encouraged by the positive developments Ambassador Reeve reports in the area of law enforcement cooperation and urge the parties to agree quickly to implement agreed law enforcement cooperation measures, including re-establishment of the Special Coordination Center and joint police training.

Turning to the Mission's broader work in Georgia, it seems clear from Ambassador Reeve's report that the Government and Parliament remain committed to democratic development and are open to the advice and active support of international friends. We also note Ambassador Reeve's observations on human rights, media freedoms, due process, independence of the judiciary, and penal conditions in Georgia, where there are circumstances that cause us concern. Democracy is always a "work in progress," and the United States agrees that a systematic approach to acting on criticisms helps insure that Georgia will meet the goal it sets for itself - that is, full integration into the Euro-Atlantic family of nations.

Thank you.